SELAH! LOVING THE PSALMS

Transposed by P. Julian

SELAH! Loving the Psalms
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<epigraphs>

Come, my beloved
Let us go to the countryside
Let us spend the night in the villages
Let us go early to the vineyards
To see if the vines have budded
If the grape blossoms have opened
And the pomegranates are in bloom
There I will give you my love.

Song of Songs 7:11-12

King David changed his tune and pretended to be mad to save his life.
As for me, I changed my tune and pretended to be sane to save my life.

Yehuda Amichai

<FULL TEXT OF WORK FOLLOWS>

from Psalm 1

Blessed is he who walks not in the counsel of the wicked
Nor stands in the place of the unjust
Nor sits in the seat of cynics
But whose delight is in the law of love

On this law the just meditate both day and night
They will be like trees planted by streams of water
That bring forth their fruit in its season
Whose leaf also does not wither

In whatever they do, those who have love will prosper

The wicked are not so
But are like the chaff which the wind drives away

Therefore the wicked shall not stand in judgement
Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous

For love preserves the way of the righteous
But the way of the wicked shall perish.

from Psalm 12

Help me, my love
For there is not one godly man left
The faithful are vanished from among the children of men

Now everyone lies to their neighbour
They speak with flattering lips
And dissemble in their double hearts

Which have said: with these tongues shall we prevail
Who is Lord over us?

But love shall still every flattering lip
Cut out the tongue that is boastful

Because of the comfortless troubles sake of the needy
And at the deep sighing of the poor
I will arise, says my love
I will set my beloved in safety from those who malign him

The words of love are pure words
Even as the silver that from the earth is tried
And purified seven times in the fire
You will keep them, my love
You will preserve them from this generation forever.

from Psalm 13

How long, my love?
Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
How long shall I take counsel in my soul

Having sorrow in my heart every day?

How long shall loneliness triumph over me?

Behold and answer me, my sweetheart, my love
Give light to my eyes, lest I weaken towards death
Lest loneliness say: I have prevailed against him
Lest my adversaries rejoice when I fall

But I trust in your love and kindness
My heart rejoices in your deliverance
I will sing a song to you my love
Because loving you has been good to me.

from Psalm 15

Who shall dwell in the sanctuary of love?
Who shall live on that holy hill?

She who walks blamelessly, does what is right,
And speaks truth in her heart
She who doesn't slander with her tongue
Nor does evil to her friend
Nor casts slurs against her own people
In whose eyes a vile man is repudiated
Who honours those who know what it is to love

She who keeps a promise
Even when it hurts
And who is constant

Who does not lend out her money out for unfair gain
Nor take a bribe against the innocent

She who does these things shall never be undone.

from Psalm 16
A Poem by David

Preserve me, my love
For in you I take refuge

My soul, you have said to your lover:
You are my love
Apart from you
I have no good thing

Her love assigned to me my portion and my cup
She made my lot secure
The lines have fallen to me in the pleasant places
Surely I have a good inheritance

I will bless my love, who has given me wise counsel
So my heart instructs me in the night gardens

I have set her thought always before me
Because she is at my right hand
I shall not be moved
Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices
My whole self shall also dwell in a place of safety

She will show me the path of life
In her presence is the fullness of joy
In her right hand there are pleasures, forevermore.

from Psalm 18

For you will light my lamp, my love
You will shine a light into my darkness
With you by my side I will conquer any enemy
For you, I would vault the highest wall

For who is my life, if not you?
Who is my rock, besides you?

You have shielded me with the truth of your salvation
Your right hand sustains me
Your gentleness has made me great
Made my stride longer and more sure

You gave me power over what troubles me
Now my footing will not slip
Now I cast out my demons
I beat them

As small as motes of dust before the wind.

from Psalm 19

The heavens declare the glory of love.
Their expanses show love’s handiwork
Day after day
They pour forth their speech
And night after night
They display this knowledge

Love’s law is perfect, restoring the soul
Love’s testimony is sure, making wise the simple
Love’s precepts are right, rejoicing the heart
Love’s commandments are pure, enlightening the eyes
Love's reverence is pristine and will endure forever
Love’s ordinances are true, and righteous altogether

Love is more to be desired than gold
Yes, than so much fine gold
Sweeter than honey
And the nectar of the honeycomb
It is by love that her servants are guided
In keeping her precepts
There is great reward

Then I will be upright
I will be blameless and innocent of any transgression

That the words of my mouth
And the meditations of my heart
Should be acceptable in your sight

My love
My rock
And my redeemer.

from Psalm 21

How the King rejoices in your strength, O Queen
You have given him his heart's desire
And have not withheld the request of his lips

For you meet him with the blessings of goodness
You set a crown of fine gold on his head
He asked life of you and you gave it to him
Even length of days forever and ever

His glory is great in your salvation
You lay honour and majesty upon him
You make him most blessed forever
You make him glad with joy to be in your presence

For the wise man trusts in his love
Through the loving kindness of the exalted
He shall not be moved.

from Psalm 22

My love, my love, why have you forsaken me?

I cry out in the daytime but you do not answer
In the night season I am not silent

Yes I am a wretch
Instead of a woman
A reproach of my kind
And despised amongst the people

All those who see me mock me
They insult me with their lips
They shake their heads, saying:
She trusts in her love
Let her love then deliver her
Let love come to her rescue, since she so delights in him

I am poured out like water
All my bones are out of joint
My heart is like wax
It is melted within me.

My strength is dried up like clay
My tongue cleaves to the roof of my mouth

A company of evildoers have enclosed me
They have pierced my hands and feet
I can count all of my bones.
They look and stare at me
They divide my garments among them
They cast lots for my clothing

My love, my love, why have you forsaken me?

from Psalm 23

My love is my shepherd
I shall not want

She provides lush pastures for my rest
She leads me beside still waters
She restores my soul

She leads me in the paths of righteousness for love's own sake

Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death
No evil shall I fear
For she is with me
Her rod and her staff they comfort me

My love prepares a banquet for me
In the presence of my enemies
She anoints my head with oil
My cup runneth over

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
All the days of my life
And I will dwell in the house of love forever.

from Psalm 26

Judge me, my love
For I have journeyed in my own integrity
I have trusted in you without wavering

Examine me, my love, and prove me
Try my heart and my mind
For your loving kindness is before my eyes

I have walked in your truth
I have not sat with deceitful people
Nor will I go in with hypocrites
I hate the assembly of evildoers
I will not sit with the wicked

My love, I adore the living spaces of your house
The place where your glory dwells

As for me, I will walk in my integrity
Fight for me, and be merciful to me
My footing holds in an even place
In the congregation of the people
I will surely bless your name.

from Psalm 30

I will extol you, my love
For you have raised me up
And not permitted my foes to rejoice over me

My love, my love, I cried out to you
And you have healed me
You have wrestled my soul up out of Hades
You have kept me alive
That I should not go down into the pit

This is how I cried to you my love
This is how I made my supplication:

What profit is there in my destruction, if I go down into the pit?
Shall the dust praise you?
Shall it declare your truth?

But now you have turned my mourning into dancing
You have removed my sackcloth
You have clothed me with gladness
And so now my heart can sing praise to you and not be silent
My love, my only love
I will give thanks to you forever!

from Psalm 31

In you, my love, I take refuge
Let me never be disappointed
Deliver me in your righteousness
Bow down your ear to me
Deliver me speedily
Be to me a strong rock
A house of defence to save me.

from Psalm 36

Your loving kindness, my love, is of the heavens
Your faithfulness reaches to the skies
Your righteousness is like the mountains of Lebanon
Your judgment like a fathomless deep

How precious is your loving kindness, my love!

Sons and daughters take refuge under the shadow of your wings

They are abundantly satisfied with the libations of your house

You will tell them: drink of the river of your delight
For with you is the spring of life
In your light shall we see light

O continue your love to those who love you
Extend your righteousness to the upright of heart.

from Psalm 38
A Psalm by David, for a Memorial

My love
Don’t rebuke me in your anger
Nor chasten me in your fierce displeasure

For your barbs have pierced me
Your hand holds me away
There is no strength in my body because of your indignation
Nor health in my bones, for what I have done

For my wrongs have gone over my head
As a terrible burden, they overwhelm me
My wounds are loathsome and corrupt
I brought them on myself, by my foolishness

I am ready to fall
I will declare my iniquity
I will be sorry for my sin

Don't forsake me, my love
My love, do not be far from me
Hurry to my aid
My love, and my salvation.

from Psalm 40

I waited patiently for you
You turned to me, and heard my cry

You brought me up out of a terrible crevasse
Out of the miry clay
You set my feet upon a rock
You gave me a firm place to stand
You have put a new song in my mouth
Even as it sings praise to you, my love

Blessed is the man who makes his wife his trust
And does not respect the proud, nor those who turn to lies

Many, my love, are the wonderful works you have done
And wonderful your thoughts which are turned towards me
They cannot be repaid
If I would declare them and speak of them
They would be more than could be numbered

You have opened my ears
You have not required sacrifice or offerings
I merely said: see, I have come to you
My name is written upon the scroll of your heart.

from Psalm 42

As the deer pants for the running brook
So my soul pants after you, my love
My soul thirsts for you, my living love
When shall I come and appear before you?

My love, my soul is in despair within me
Therefore I remember you
From the lands of Jordan
From the heights of Hermon
From the peak of Mizar
Deep calls to deep at the noise of your cascades
All your swells and your breakers have swept over me

These things I remember
And pour out my soul within me
How I used to go with the crowd
Leading them to your house
With the voice of joy and praise
A multitude observing a holy day

My tears have been my food both day and night
While they continually ask me
Where is your love?

Why are you in despair, my soul
Why are you disturbed within me?
Hope in love!
For I shall still praise you
The saving help of my countenance, and my love.

from Psalm 45
A Wedding Song

My heart overflows with a noble theme
I recite my verses for the King
My tongue is like the pen of a ready writer

You are the most excellent amongst the sons of men
Grace has anointed your lips
Therefore love has blessed you forever

Strap your sword on your thigh, mighty one
Your splendour and your majesty
In your majesty ride to win
For truth, humility, and righteousness
Let your right hand display awesome deeds

Your throne, my King, is forever and ever.
A sceptre of equity is the sceptre of your kingdom.
You have loved righteousness, and hated wickedness
Therefore love has anointed you
With the oil of prevailing gladness

Listen, daughter, consider, and turn your ear
Forget your own people, and your father's house
So that your King will desire your beauty
Honour him, for he is your love

The princess inside is glorious
Her clothing interwoven with gold
She shall be led to her King in finest damask
The girls, her companions who follow her, shall accompany her
With gladness and rejoicing they shall be led
They shall enter into the palace of love

Your sons will take the place of your fathers
You love shall make them princes over all of the earth
And will make your name to be remembered in all generations
Therefore the peoples shall give you thanks
For ever and ever, amen.

from Psalm 50
A Psalm by Asaph

But to the wicked love is fierce and says:

What right do you have to declare my statutes?
That you have taken my covenant on your lips
Since you hate such learning
And throw my words behind you?

When you saw a thief
You colluded with him
You are entangled with those
Who would betray their wedding vows

You give your mouth to evil
Your tongue frames deceit
You sit and speak against your brother
You slander your own mother's son

You have done these things and I kept silent
You thought that I was just like you
But no, I will rebuke you
And accuse you
In front of your eyes
So consider this
You who abandon love
Lest you be rent into pieces
And there be none to deliver you, Selah.

from Psalm 53

A Contemplation by David

The fool has said in his heart: there is no love
People are corrupt, and have done abominable iniquity
There is no one who does justice

But love goes seeking among the children of men
To see if there are any who have understood
Who seek intently after her

Have the wicked no knowledge?
Do they eat up our People as they eat bread
And call not on love?

Love has put them to shame
Because love has rejected them

Oh that the salvation of the people
Would come down out of Zion
When love brings her people back from captivity
Then all men shall rejoice
Then all men shall know love and be glad.

from Psalm 55
For the Chief Musician, on Stringed Instruments

I said: Oh that I had wings like a dove!
Then I would fly away, and be at rest
Behold, then I would wander far off
I would lodge in the wilderness, Selah.

I would hurry to a shelter from the stormy wind and squalls

For it was not an enemy who insulted me
Then I could have endured it
Neither was it she who hated me
Who raised herself up against me
Then I would have hidden myself from her

But it was you, a person like me
My companion, and my familiar friend

We took sweet fellowship together.
We walked in love’s house in company

They never change
Those who don’t respect love
Who would raise their hands against their friends
Who would violate their sacred covenant

Her mouth was smooth as butter
But her heart was warfare

Her words were softer than oil
And yet they were drawn swords.

from Psalm 61

Hear my cry, my love
From the ends of the earth I will cry out to you
When my heart is overwhelmed

For you have been a refuge for me
A strong tower from the enemy
I will dwell in your tent forever
I will take refuge in the shelter of your wings, Selah.

For you, my love, have heard my vows
You have given me the heritage of the one who loves you
You will prolong my life
I will live for generations
I will be enthroned in your presence forever

Lay down your kindness and truth so they may preserve me
So that I will sing praise to your name for ever
And that I may fulfil my vows
Every day that is allotted to me to live.

from Psalm 68

Rejoice before love!
Love is the mother of the motherless
Love defends the widow

Love puts the lonely within families
Love brings out the prisoners with singing
But those who do not love
They dwell in a blighted land

You, my love, sent me plentiful rain
You confirmed your inheritance when I was weary
Your wholeness moved within me

She who dwells in a loving home divides the spoils
While the lonely sleep out among the fires
Yours are the wings of a dove sheathed with silver
With feathers of a shining gold

Why do you look in envy, you rugged mountains
At the place where my love chooses to reign?

Yes, I cry
My love and I will dwell in that place forever.

from Psalm 69
To the Shoshannim; of David

Save me, my love
For the waters have come up to my neck
I sink in deep mire where I can find no foothold

I am sunk in deep waters
Where floods overflow me

I am weary with crying
My throat is dry
My eyes fail looking for you my love

Those who detest me without cause
Number more than the hairs of my head
Those who would cut me off
My wrongful enemies
They are mighty

I must restore what I did not steal away

Deliver me out of the mire
Do not let me sink
Don't let the floodwaters overwhelm me
Or the deep yawn to swallow me up
Don't let the pit clamp its jaws shut on me

Answer me, my love, out of your kindness and goodness
By the proliferation of your tender mercies, turn to me
Do not hide your face from your beloved

But answer me speedily!
Drawn near to my soul and redeem it
Ransom me
Let your salvation, my love, protect me, Selah.

from Psalm 71

In you my love, I take refuge
You will not let me be disappointed
Deliver me in your righteousness, and rescue me
Turn your ear to me and save me

Be to me a rock of refuge upon which I may always depend

Though I am a marvel to many
You are my love and my strong refuge
My mouth shall be filled with your praises
Songs of your honour, which will endure until the end of days

So remember me, my love
Do not reject me in my old age
Do not forsake me when my strength fails me

Yes, even when I am old and grey
Do not forsake me, my love
Until I have declared your strength to the next generation
Until your excellence is clear to those who are to come.

from Psalm 72
By Solomon

Love, give these lands your Justice
Your righteousness, even to the heirs of royalty
So that monarchs may judge the people with righteousness
And the poor with justice

For this is the fruit of love -

Love would judge the poor of the people
Love would save the children of the needy
Love would break the oppressor into pieces

Love would descend like rain on the freshly cut grass
Love in showers that would restore the Earth
In those days when the righteous shall flourish
In an abundance of peace
Until the moon is no longer
Love shall have dominion from sea to sea
From the river to the ends of the earth

Those who cry out in the wilderness
Shall bow down before love
Love will redeem their souls
From oppression and violence

Love will deliver the needy when they cry
The poor, who have no helper

But the enemies of love
They shall eat nothing but dust.

from Psalm 73
A Psalm by Asaph

Surely love is good to the people
To those who are pure in heart

But as for me, my feet were almost gone
My steps had nearly slipped
For I was envious of the arrogant
When I saw the prosperity of the wicked
They are free from the burdens of human beings
Neither are they plagued like other people

Therefore pride is like a chain around their neck
Violence covers them like a garment
That eyes bulge with fat
Their minds pass the limit of conceit
They scoff and speak with malice

When I tried to understand this
It was too painful for me
Until I entered the sanctuary of love
And considered the end that they would come to

Surely they are set in slippery places
They are thrown down to destruction

How they are suddenly destroyed!
They are completely swept away with terrors

Now I am continually with you, my love
You have held my right hand
You will guide me with your counsel
And afterwards receive me to glory

There is no one on earth I desire besides you
My love, the strength of my heart
And my portion forever.

from Psalm 78
To Jeduthun

The waters saw you, my love
The waters saw you, and they writhed
The depths, surely, also convulsed
The clouds poured out rain
The skies resounded with thunder
Your arrows too flashed around
The voice of this thunder was in the whirlwind
The lightning lit up the world
The earth it trembled and shook
Your way was through the seas
Your paths through the great waters
Your footsteps were unknown
You led me like a flock of lambs
By the hand of our ancestors
You are my love, who does wonders.

from Psalm 84
A Psalm by the Sons of Korah

How lovely are your dwellings
My love of many legions
My soul longs, and even faints for the courts of my love

Blessed are those who dwell in your house
They are constantly praising you

Blessed are those
Whose strength is in love
Who have set their hearts upon a pilgrimage
Passing through the valley of weeping
They make it a place of springs
Yes, the autumn rain covers them with blessings
They go from strength to strength

Behold, my love and my shield
Look at the face of your anointed
For one day in your courts
Is better than a thousand elsewhere
I would rather be a doorkeeper
In the house of my love

Than to dwell in the tents of wickedness
My love is a sun and a shield
My love will give grace and glory
My love withholds no bounty from one who walks blamelessly

My love of many legions
Blessed am I by the trust that I put in you.

from Psalm 91

She who lives in the dwelling place of love
Will rest in the shadow of the Almighty

I will say of you my love:
You are my refuge and my fortress
My life, in whom I trust

For love will deliver you from the snare of the poacher
And from things that despise life
Love will cover you with its wings
Under her wings shall you take refuge
His faithfulness shall be your shield and your rampart

You shall not be afraid of the terrors of the night
Nor of the arrow that flies by day
Nor of the pestilence that walks in darkness
Nor the destruction that wastes under the noonday sun

Though a thousand fall at your side
And ten thousand at your right hand
Fear will not come near you
You will stare it down with your eyes

Because you have made love your refuge
Because your love is your dwelling place
No evil shall befall you

Love will put angels in charge of you
To guide you in all of your ways
They will bear you up in their hands
So that you will not dash your foot upon the rocks

Your love will be with you in trouble
He will deliver you, and honour you
He will satisfy you with a long life
And show you your salvation.

from Psalm 93

Love reigns!
Love is clothed with majesty!
Love is armed with strength
The world is thus established
It cannot be moved

Her throne was established long ago
She is with all eternal things

The seas have lifted up, my love
The seas have lifted up their voice
The seas lift up their waves

Above the voices of many waters
The mighty breakers of the sea
Love upon high is mighty
Her statutes stand firm
Holiness adorns her house
Love, forevermore.

from Psalm 101
A Psalm by David

When will you come to me, my love?

A song of love and justice will be on my lips
To you my love I will sing praise

So then: when will you come to me?

I will walk in my home
With a blameless heart
I will not covet any vile thing
I will scorn the deeds
Of people who do not love
They will not be my people
Such ugly hearts will not be my portion either

So when will you come to me, my love?

I will silence whoever slanders his neighbour
I will cast down the haughty and conceited
My regard will be for the faithful of this land
I will make a place for them to dwell with me

He who practices deceit
will not dwell within my house
She who speaks falsehood
Will have no merit in my eyes

I will seek to walk in a perfect way

So when will you come to me, my love?

from Psalm 107

I wandered the wilderness in desolation
I found no city to dwell in
Hungry and thirsty
My soul fainted within me

I cried out to Her in my trouble
And She delivered me out of my distress

She turns my wilderness into pools of water
And my dry land into watersprings

She blesses me, and my abundance increases
She will not suffer my stock to be decreased.

from Psalm 108
A Song; a psalm of David

My heart is steadfast, my love
I will sing and I will make music with my soul

Wake up, harp and lyre!
I will wake up the dawn
I will give thanks to you
My love among the nations
I will sing praises to you among the peoples

For your loving kindness
Is great above the heavens
Your faithfulness reaches to the skies
Be exalted, my love, above the heavens
Let your glory be over all the Earth

Who will bring me into the fortified city?
Who has led me to the city we shall take?
Gilead is mine, Manasseh is mine
Ephraim is my mantle, Judah is my sceptre

Give us help against our enemies
For the help of man is vain
Through love we will be valiant
For it is love that will tread down our enemies.

from Psalm 113

Praise love!
Praise, you subjects of the kingdom
Praise the name of love!

Blessed be the name of love
From this time forth and forevermore
From the break of dawn
To the setting of the sun
Love’s name is to be praised

Love is ascendant above all nations
Love has glory above the heavens.
Who is like love, our love
Who has a seat upon the high places?

Who humbles himself to see
The things that exist
In the heavens and the earth?

Love raises the poor up out of the dust
Lifts up the needy from the ash heap
And sits them at the table with princes
Even with the exalted amongst the people

Love settles the lonely woman in her home
As a joyful mother of children
Praise love!

from Psalm 114

When the people went forth out of Egypt
What was it, you sea, that you fled?
You river, so that you turned back?
You mountains, that you skipped like rams
You little hills, like lambs?

Tremble, all earth, at the presence of love
At the presence of the love of the people
Which turns the rock into pools of water
The flint into watersprings.

from Psalm 124
A Song of Ascents

If it had not been love that was on our side
Let the people now say that

If it had not been love that was on our side
When men rose up against us
Then they would have swallowed us alive
When their wrath was kindled against us
Then the waters would have overwhelmed us
Then the proud flood would have gone over our souls

Blessed be my love
Who has not given me as prey to their teeth
My soul has escaped like a bird from a snare
The snare is broken, and we have escaped

Our help is in the name of love
Which holds together both Heaven and Earth.

from Psalm 126

When love brought back those who returned to her promise
We were like those who dream
Then our mouths were filled with laughter
And our tongues with singing

Then it was said among the nations
Love has done great things for them

Yes love has done great things for us
And we are glad

Restore our fortunes again, my love
Like the streams in the Negev

Those who sow in tears will reap in joy
She who goes out weeping
Carrying seed for sowing
Will certainly come again with joy
Carrying her sheaves.

from Psalm 127
By Solomon

Unless love builds the house
They labour in vain who build it

Unless love watches over the city
The watchman guards it in vain

It is vain for you to rise up early
To stay up late
Eating the bread of toil
For love gives sleep to its beloved

Behold, children are a heritage of love
The fruit of the womb is love's reward.

from Psalm 128
A Song of Ascents

Blessed are those who respect love
Who walk in her ways

For you will eat of the labour of your hands
You will be happy, and all will be well with you
Your wife will be as a fruitful vine
In the innermost parts of your house
Your children like olive plants
Around your table

Behold, thus is the man blessed who knows the ways of love.

from Psalm 130

Out of the depths I have cried to you, my love
Lover, hear my voice
Let your ear be attentive to the voice of my petitions

If you, my love, kept a record of sins
Lord, who could stand up?
But there is forgiveness with you

And for this are you deeply honoured

I wait for my love
My soul waits
I hope in her word

My soul longs for her word
More than watchmen long for the morning
More than watchmen for the morning

So people, hope in love
For with love there is always kindness
With love there is abundant redemption

Love will redeem the people
From everything that assails them.

from Psalm 132
A Song of Ascents

Surely I will not come into the structure of my house
Nor go up into my bed
I will not give sleep to my eyes
Or slumber to my eyelids
Until I find out a place for love
A dwelling for the Mighty of the People

Behold, we heard of it in Ephrathah
We came upon it in the field of Jaar
We will go into love’s dwelling place
We will worship at her footstool

Arise, love, into your anointed place
You, and the ark of your strength
Let your faithful be clothed with righteousness
Let your saints shout for joy!

from Psalm 133

See how good and how pleasant it is
For the people to live together in unity!

It is like precious oil anointing the head
It is like the dew of Hermon
That comes down upon the hills of Zion

For there love gives her blessing
Even life, forevermore.

from Psalm 136

Give thanks to love, for it is good
For this loving kindness endures forever

To that which alone does great wonders
For this loving kindness endures forever

To that which by understanding made the heavens
For this loving kindness endures forever

To that which spread out the earth above the waters
For this loving kindness endures forever

To that which made the great lights
For this loving kindness endures forever

The sun to rule by day
For this loving kindness endures forever

The moon and stars to rule by night
For this loving kindness endures forever

With a strong hand, and with an outstretched arm
For this loving kindness endures forever

To that which led the people through the wilderness
For this loving kindness endures forever

To that which defied great kings
For this loving kindness endures forever

Who remembered us in our low estate
For this loving kindness endures forever

Who has delivered us from our adversaries
For this loving kindness endures forever

Who gives sustenance to every creature
For this loving kindness endures forever

O give thanks to the might of love
For this loving kindness endures forever.

from Psalm 137(i)

By the Rivers of Babylon
There we sat down
Yea and we wept
When we remembered Zion

On the willows of the river
We hung up our instruments
For those who held us, they asked for our songs
Those who tormented us
Demanded our Songs of Joy

Sing us a song about your dearest love!

How can we sing a song of love when it is lost to us?

Bring judgement on the foolish child
Who would say this of our great love
Who would say: raze it!
Raze it even to its foundation!

By the Rivers of Babylon
There we sat down
Yea and we wept
When we remembered Zion.

from Psalm 137(ii)

If I forget you, my love
Let my right hand forget its skill
Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth

If I forget you
If I don't prefer you above my dearest joy -

from Psalm 139

My love, you have searched me
And you know me
You know my sitting down and my rising up
You perceive my thoughts from afar
You search out my path and my lying down
And are acquainted with all of my ways

You hem me in
From behind and before
You have laid your hand on me
Even knowledge of these things is beyond me
It is lofty
I cannot attain it

Where would I hide from your knowledge?
Or where could I flee from your presence?
If I send up into heaven you are there
If I make my bed in the land of the dead
Behold, you are there

If I take the wings of the dawn
And settle in the uttermost parts of the sea
Even there your hand will lead me
And your right hand will hold me
If I say: surely the darkness will overwhelm me
The light around me will be night
Even the darkness does not hide from you
But the night shines as the day

My frame was not hidden from you
When I was made in secret
Woven together in the depths of the Earth
Your eyes saw my body
In your scrolls they were all written

The days that were ordained for me
Even before any of them existed at all.

from Psalm 143
A Psalm by David

I remember the days of old
I meditate on all your achievements
I contemplate the work of your hands

I spread forth my hands to you
My soul thirsts for you like a parched land, Selah.

For you are my love
Your resolve is superb
Lead me in the houses of the holy

Hurry to answer me, my love
My spirit fails
Don’t hide your face from me
So that I do not wane
Like those who go down into the pit

Cause me to hear your loving kindness in the morning
For I trust in you
Help me to know the way in which I should walk
For I lift up my soul to you.
from Psalm 144

Blessed be my love, who is my rock
Who teaches my hands to fight
And my fingers to battle for righteousness

My love, in his kindness, is my fortress
My high tower, my redeemer
My shield, and the one in whom I take refuge

My love, what am I, that you care for me so?
Whose daughter am I, that you have such regard?
For my life is like a breath
My days are like a shadow
That will pass away

Stretch out your hand above me
Rescue me, and deliver me out of the deluge
Out of the hands of strangers who dissemble with their mouths

I will sing a new song to you, my love
On a lyre of many strings, I will sing praises to you

Love is such as gives salvation to Kings

Then our sons will grow like well-loved plants
Our daughters fierce like pillars carved around a palace
Our barns full with every kind of provision
Our sheep fruitful, bringing thousands to our fields

There will be no breaking in
There will be no going away
There will be no outcry in our streets
Happy are those who dwell in the house of love!

from Psalm 150

Praise love!
Praise love in her sanctuary
Praise love in exaltation
For all of her acts of power!

Praise love for her mighty acts
Praise you my love for your excellent greatness

Praise you with the sounding of the trumpet
Praise you with harp and lyre
Praise you with tambourines and dancing
Praise you with guitar, bass and flute

Praise you with loud cymbals
Praise you with resounding cymbals!
Let everything that has breath praise you!

Praise love!

<AFTERWORD>

from Love in a Time of Lovecraft

To the Highest and Hidden All-Father

I.

AT FIRST glance this book comprises something fairly simple: a straightforward transposition of some fifty selected Psalms, exchanging references to God for references to love or various human instances of love.

Before I created the book I had been thinking for years about the connection that is often made between God and love. The suggestion that these terms are in fact interchangeable because on a basic level God is love, God filled our hearts with love.

There is also the simple but compelling view that any true religious or spiritual practice must focus on fostering love and bringing it into the world; and that if it fosters violence or hatred or control then it is not a true religion.

These ideas came together in my office on one bleak and wintry Saturday afternoon.

I had a pile of other work that I really should have been doing, but I made a couple of exploratory transpositions of the Psalms and I was surprised by how much I liked them.

Despite my other pressing tasks I decided to crack on and I transposed what ended up being a collection of around fifty Psalms, resulting in (more or less) what is contained in this book.

The whole collection took me very little time, but then I was simply swapping out a few words and doing a bit of necessary redaction/reorganisation.

If I had actually been composing individual poetic works it would have taken much, much longer, with no reasonable hope of reaching the poetic quality and intensity of the original Psalms.

The greatest amount of time I have spent with this book has been in considering whether I should publish the work, and what its value might actually be.

I felt that my own input had been so minimal, and I knew how precious the Psalms are to devout people across a range of religious traditions.

I also deliberated for a long time about how I might introduce and explain the intent of these works, if indeed an introduction was required at all.

II.

ONE CONSIDERATION pushing me towards publication was the possibility that I might liberate these songs of longing and devotion from their specific religious context. To open a new and wider audience to the intense emotional and spiritual states experienced by the original psalmist(s).

There are many atheists and agnostics who can accept the idea of love possessing some powerful spiritual reality, and perhaps even being something that might be considered synonymous with God.

I have been criticised by some people (who generally dislike my work) for the fact that people would be better off first encountering the original Psalms, and not the transposed version that I have rendered here.

I do have some sympathy for that view, and for various reasons my sympathy has been growing of late. I do wonder whether the Psalms might have been better off left alone, and not given the redactive treatment that I have given to them.

To contextualise that concern within the framework of scripture, I might borrow from Psalm 69:

Let not those who wait on you, O Lord of Hosts, be ashamed for my sake: let not those who seek you be confounded because of me, O God of Israel.

In the end I think that this book is unlikely to do any harm, and that the eventual effect of these transpositions might be to pique people's interest in the original works and encourage them to seek them out.

Perhaps even giving sincere seekers a sort of key to unlock some of the more obscure or troubling passages contained within the Psalms.

III.

ONE COMPELLING reason for me to publish these works is a dark theological question which has troubled me for as long as I can remember, and that is: have you ever stopped to wonder why God so desires our love?

Have you wondered why an omnipotent God, complete with every perfection, should be so desirous and commanding of our love; and so wrathful, violent, even murderous when it is not surrendered to Him?

Who says: I love you, indeed I Am Love; but my love for you is conditional upon you obeying me, praising me, bowing down before me and worshipping me, accepting my every power over you even unto death.

Saying: I am everything, you are nothing, you are wretched, I am your master, this is Love.

Have you wondered at the nature of such a God?

A God who would toy with the obedient Abraham, saying: prove that you love me. Kill your own son, who makes me burn with jealousy, whom I fear you love more than you love me.

Yes: stab and kill and burn this delightful, helpful little boy, to prove that I am your one, your only, your favourite in all of the world.

A God who would toy with the faithful Job, conspiring with the powers of evil to visit unimaginable suffering upon him, because God fears that Job’s good fortune might be the motivation for his godliness and devotion.

You say you love me? You don’t love me.

Let's see how much you love me when I ruin your life, b-tch.

A paranoid God who hates losing control, who is jealous of any and all competitors for our love. Who would have us killed rather than choose another God, even so mild a God as a statue of a golden calf, a symbol of fertility and thus an intolerable challenge to this sterile, impotent, Old-Man-God.

If this were an actual man, a man of flesh and blood acting this way towards his wife, or his children, would we praise him and worship him and honour him all the days of our life?

Or would we call the police, and say to his wife and kids: get out, get out now, this man is a monster, he will murder you, this is not love but a terrible corruption of it... a disease, not love at all but hatred, violence, control –

So: do we worship a Loving God?

Or is this a God who hoards our love, drinks of it deeply, so that there is little or none left for the rest of us?

And as a consequence of worshipping this jealous God: do we deprive each other of this same human love that we so badly need to participate in, as lover and as beloved, with such terrible results for every human being in the world, so that we are so literally dying for love?

IV.

THE LONGER I look at scripture the more I suspect that Lovecraft may have gotten things essentially right.

That there may be more than one God in this universe of ours, and that various parts of scripture are inspired by the different faces of these Gods.

The Gnostics pointed towards much the same thing. Saying that much of what we call religion is really devotion to a malevolent demiurge, rather than the highest and hidden All-Father.

A creature they called Yaldaboath, the abominable spawn of the errant Sophia, who forgot the partnership requirements of creation and tried to birth her own God into the world.

I get the same impression reading the Quran as I do the Bible. So many beautiful and inspired things all mixed in with things that seem hateful and even abominable.

I have heard Muslim scholars say that the Quran is a loving and merciful book, because most surahs begin with the Bismillah: in the name of Allah the beneficent and the merciful.

However it is hard to reconcile much of the content of the book with that very noble sentiment.

A lot of my work has been to find various jewels in scripture, to polish them up and set them in beautiful and humane settings that are available to every person and not just the devout.

Song of Songs is perhaps the best example I can think of. I find that it surpasses even the Psalms in beauty and intensity, and in my view (and this has also been the view of various Rabbis) it is the jewel in the crown of the whole of western scripture.

To my knowledge it is the best scriptural example of love being set on a human and humane level, a simple level that all feeling people can feel, with a longing that will burn within our souls for as long as we remain in the world.

V.

EVERYONE HAS some vision of the Divine, even those who dispute the existence of such a thing. You can't really speak of it, not even to deny its existence, without having some kind of vision of what it is.

In my own vision I tend to see a sane God, a loving God, who when faced with masses of people bowing and scraping to Him would say:

Why pour out your love to me?

I am love, I am perfection, I have no need of your love and devotion.

Your priests have told you to pour out your love to me, but that is only so they can appropriate that love unto themselves, these unnatural and sterile men who long to bask in your love and devotion.

You can honour me by sending your love out into the world, multiplying it amongst each other so that your human lives may become more heavenly, that

you might live more like gods and not (as you have wrongly been called) wretches and filth and worms.

VI.

THE TRANSPOSITIONS in this book might best be seen as an attempt to wrestle some very beautiful poetry back into the arms of humanity from the clutches of an (intermittently) insane God.

The real point of the re-imagining is not to blaspheme or insult; it is merely to illustrate how much of our human love has been soaked up by the various Gods we have cried out to. Gods who rarely respond, and who appear very clearly not to reciprocate our love.

To put that in the terms of the Psalms: how long, Lord? How long shall we cry out, in the knowledge that you have forsaken us?

How long shall we cry out? The downtrodden, the meek: how long shall they make their supplication?

For in spite of the comfortless troubles sake of the needy, and the deep sighing of the poor, there is never any response, their suffering is never abated, it is only increased, no matter how they cry out.

How long until we seek these things from other human beings; beings who do care, who can and will respond, who may realise that heaven can come to Earth, through their love for each other, their goodness, their courage, their sacrifice?

VII.

THE STRENGTH of the longing and devotion expressed in these humanised Psalms may strike some people as strange and perhaps even uncomfortable.

That may be because we have been conditioned to doubt whether such love could ever really exist, and to fear it, shy away from it, when we do encounter it in our mostly shallow lives.

And yet people of character, people of genuine and conscious refinement, once they have considered this new transposition, may find a beauty and a majesty here, and even an overwhelming attraction to the thoughts and the feelings that are expressed in these works.

And perhaps the first inklings of hope: could this be possible? Can human beings really love each other in this way?

To which the answer is, of course: of course they can.

It's just that we see love so very rarely these days, living in the shadow of late industrial capitalism, where the forces of commerce and false religion seek to drive us apart from one another, in order to provoke that longing in us which makes us consume, worship, consume.

VIII.

THE EVENTUAL hope of this work is that there may be other writing currently monopolised by religion that can be restored to its human origins, for human beings to appreciate on that humble but compelling level.

And that they might promote the main purpose of story and of song, which is the relief, instruction, sustenance and refinement of the human heart, especially the hearts of lonely people, the broken-hearted and the discouraged who have so much need of relief.

In the end my main hope is that this work might bring people some comfort, and perhaps even some joy.

There is sadness and longing in these Psalms, but only to the extent that these things are intrinsically connected with the act of loving itself.

And they are more than made up for, in fact they heighten and arouse, the wonder that love also brings, its consolations and its joy.

So that through this range of feeling - through suffering and through heartbreak and through joy - people might be brought closer to the depths of their shared humanity, out of which, after all, these astonishing works of devotion originally sprang.

P. Julian
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